Description

The Purpose of a Research Paper

When you think in terms of the chronology of the research process, a research paper should represent the culmination of all the work that has gone before it. That does not mean that it shouldn't be written until the study has been completed. If anything, it should be treated like a work-in-progress that will be written and re-written as the study unfolds and the results become known.

The nature of the research and the protocol being followed will directly influence the format of the paper, but the most important variable should be the intended audience. Your eventual readers may find the paper in an academic database, but to get to that point, your initial readers will be the journal editor and peer reviewers who will determine whether or not your paper is worthy of publication in their esteemed journal.

Taking this transactional perspective should help you to avoid the common mistake of writing an encyclopedic summary of your research and submitting a book report rather than a research paper. A true research paper, by contrast, should make a positive contribution to the existing body of knowledge. It should encapsulate your position on a topic based on that knowledge, combined with the revelations of the research study you just completed.

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Go to the Source

Your choice of journal will ultimately determine the type of article you will present for publication. For example, the Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine's website provides both author guidelines and submission guidelines, in addition to a specific list of the types of articles published:

- ***Original Research*** – well-rounded studies that clearly advance prior knowledge on a specific topic
- ***Case Reports*** – featuring a specific anonymous patient presenting an unusual disease, treatment, or drug interaction
- ***Reviews*** – of prior research
- ***Perspectives*** – personal opinion/narrative on a specific topic
- ***Analyses*** – in-depth analysis of a new policy or medical advance

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- ***Symposia Pieces*** – summaries of conference or symposium presentations
- ***Book Reviews*** – of newly published books
- ***Profiles*** – of notable people in the field
- ***Interviews*** – either as a transcript of the interview or a personal reflection.
- ***Focus Topic Articles*** – for specific topic sections featured in one edition

Original Research

The presentation of original research garners the most interest from journal editors in the same way that newspaper editors want to be the first to break a news story. If there is research in their specific niche that represents a significant advancement or a counterintuitive outcome, they will want to publish the paper either by virtue of their journal's prestige in the niche, or as the underdog journal looking to compete with the leader.

In that environment, your research paper could follow two distinct formats:

- ***Argumentative*** – where you take a declarative stance in the presentation of your research. You typically take a clear position on a topic that is considered debatable with the intention of presenting data that will be considered controversial or counterintuitive.
- ***Analytical*** – rather than taking a clear position, the research is presented in the form of a question being asked, with the reader then accompanying the author on a journey of exploration and evaluation to arrive at the concluding data and commentary on how this data contributes to the body of knowledge.

Authorship With Constraints

The driving force in writing a research paper will always be your passion for the research topic and the data you are eager to share with your audience. However, achieving that objective will require that you deliver your paper within the constraints of the academic publishing process. Research your targeted journal thoroughly, and present a paper that best aligns to the type of article that journal prefers to publish.

Category

1. Journal Guidelines
2. Reporting Research

Date Created
2016/02/22
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